

Health Update: **Anthrax** Exposure in DC

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March 17, 2005

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FROM: JULIA M. ECKSTEIN
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SUBJECT: Update on Anthrax Exposure in Department of Defense Mail Facility

ATTENTION: There have been no detections of anthrax in Missouri and this alert only applies to the DC, Maryland, and Virginia areas.

On March 10th, routine samples from an air sampling device at the Pentagon Remote Delivery Facility were collected and preliminary tests, reported to the Department of Defense (DoD) on March 14, indicated the possibility of the presence of *Bacillus anthracis*. Also, on March 14th, an alarm at a separate Defense office in the Skyline complex indicated the possibility of the presence of a biohazard. As a result, employees in close proximity to the mail handling at these two facilities and the United States Postal Service (USPS) V-Street feeder facility were placed on a three-day course of prophylactic antibiotics. There were no Biohazard Detection System (BDS) alarms in any USPS facility, and the measures at the V-Street facility were a precaution because of the apparent connection of the two events at the Defense facilities. The USPS, Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Federal Bureau of Investigation, State and local offices are coordinating to determine next steps, which are different for each location.

The alarm at a Defense mail room in the Skyline complex on Monday, March 14, proved to be from a particle counter rather than from a biological sensor, and no testing indicated *B. anthracis*. Multiple environmental samples from the Skyline buildings were negative for *B. anthracis* by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and culture. Access to the involved area remains restricted pending further investigation. Other portions of the Skyline complex will reopen tomorrow. The DoD is recommending that employees who were offered prophylactic antibiotics, continue taking them until the further results are received. These results are expected this morning (March 17).

With regard to the Pentagon Remote Delivery Facility, the initial sample was tested by a non-Laboratory Response Network (LRN) contract lab, and found to be positive by PCR and culture. Repeat PCR testing of this same sample at the DHS Laboratory at Fort Detrick was also positive. Testing of a second portion of the original sample by the DHS Laboratory was negative by PCR and culture. All subsequent environmental samples have been negative by PCR and culture. PCR results of the actual filter from the collection device are still pending at this time. Until these results are received, the Pentagon Remote Delivery Facility remains closed, and the DoD is recommending that employees who have been offered prophylactic antibiotics continue taking them until the further results are received. These results are expected this morning (March 17).

With regard to the USPS V-Street facility, all PCR tests performed by the Maryland Laboratory Response Network (LRN) were negative. On the basis of these results and the absence of findings connecting the V-Street facility to events at the Skyline and Pentagon Remote Deliver Facility, the V-Street facility has reopened and the Postal Service's National Medical Director has advised V Street employees who have received prophylactic antibiotics that it is not necessary to continue taking this medication.

Summary

The V-Street facility is now open and employees have been recommended to discontinue taking the prophylactic antibiotics.

The Skyline facility will partially reopen today and employees have been recommended to continue taking the prophylactic antibiotics until the further results are received this morning.

The Pentagon Remote Delivery Facility remains closed and employees have been recommended to continue taking the prophylactic antibiotics until the further results are received this morning.